

CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

Broadway and Off Broadway reports no new openings this week, but nearby summer theatre activity is as hectic as usual. Broadway business which took a sharp dip over the July 4 holiday is not expected to profit from the Shriner's convention.

Current Theatre Reviews

At Home with Ethel Waters- Sea Cliff, LI, Theatre. Broadway success predicted for Miss Waters by 2 New York drama critics if she chooses to bring her evening of songs and patter to town this season. Singer-actress proves she can make 2 hours go quickly and entertainly, sums up Lewis, Cue. While Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, comments that there is nobody in the entertainment business who can touch this fine artist in the vast range of her abilities. Both critics also okayed the piano solos of her accompanist Reginald Beane. Show is actually a review of her entire career, including the songs she made famous, "Dinah," "Am I Blue" and "Stormy Weather."

Strawhat Tryouts

Love in Upper Sandusky, a farce by Edward Emerson and Charles Williams which was tried out at Sea Cliff, LI, Theatre, was panned by Hank, Variety, as hopeless. 19 member cast is squandered. Sole amusing portion of evening, mugg reports, was Jerry Lester's curtain bit from his TV act... Postman Always Rings Twice, a revised version of James M Cain's script starring Barbara Payton and Tom Neal viewed at Norwich, Conn. Theatre by Coleman, Mirror, was rated as a tighter, faster moving thriller than when the critic first saw the play on Broadway. Herbert Kneeter production plans national tour with 2 film stars this fall... The Play's the Thing, featuring Ezio Pinza, boasts a cast which would be superlative in toughest NY competition, reports Hawkins, WT&S. Francis Compton, Philip Loeb, Alexander Clark and Vilma Kurer all turn in fine jobs in performance caught at Falmouth, Mass., Playhouse. Pinza is the backbone of the brilliant situation comedy.

Subway Circuit

The Time of The Cuckoo, starring Vicki Cummings in Shirley Booth's role, is given an entertaining production in his "Subway Circuit" edition, approves Sheaffer, Eagle, who viewed it at Brighton, LI. If Cummings doesn't bring to the role all the humanity and poignance that Booth did, she doesn't lose a single laugh. Critic notes that star is probably too attractive to be entirely credible as a lonely woman, though she turns in an effective, enjoyable performance. Remainder of cast does well.

Brandies Festival

The International Set, Time critic Louis Kronenberger's play based on his own novel, was disappointing to Hoffman, New Republic, when viewed at the recent Brandies Comedy Festival. The epigrammatic result was far from any of the problems of modern life, he feared, or from the life of modern billionaires either. Reviewer noted that use of top performers in outdoor reading proved a relatively inexpensive way of showing what could be done with a good play, if they had a good play to begin with.

' Off Broadway '

New Dramatists Workshop will produce its plays next season at American Academy of Dramatic Arts. 21 plays of group have been optioned for Broadway next season...5 week conference for theatre writers opens July 20 at American Theatre Wing conducted by Ted Apstein...Salem Ludwig resumed his role in Monday's Heroes at the Greenwich Mews theatre, which gives performances Thur, Fri and Sat nights...Pinocchio, a children's play adapted and directed by Kay Rockefeller, will be presented at Kaufman Auditorium July 27-29, at 11 AM and 2 40 PM daily.

Cartoon type ads for Circle-in-Square's The Grass Harp tell why Brother, Sister, Grandma, etc enjoy the show...Theatre De Lys advertises "really air conditioned" for its second and final week of The Scarecrow...Originals Only continues with One Foot to the Sea...Current Stages continues with Norm Vein's The Penguin.

' Theatre Record Comment '

"Me and Juliet" original cast album (Victor) rated an 80 from Billboard's staff. Though only a very few ditties in the score might attract customers, trade paper considered disc a well done package that should do well among the show album buyers. Wilson, Times, disagreed. The music and lyrics, he feared, are routine by anybody's standards. While the singing he tabbed workmanlike without being distinguished. Package also lacks data either on label or on sleeve as to who sings which songs.

' Vaudeville '

"Alpine Echoes" presented at Radio City Music Hall presents scenes inspired by Swizz holiday spots. Duke Art, Warren-Latona and Sparks, and Eric Hutson are featured with the regular company... Palace show headlines Marty May and Bonnie Baker. Also 3 Swifts, Roberto and Alicia, Larry Leung, and Jerry Morgan.

' An English View '

Whatever the much talked about "American way of life" may be, going to the theatre is not part of it for the average New Yorker, sums up Manchester, Stage, British trade weekly's NY critic agrees with viewpoint expressed in recent Variety that in London people attend theatre as an institution, while in NY they go to hits.

The New Yorker, the Englishman believes, does not use his own judgement when play going is concerned. Unless the first night notices practically proclaim that the play is the greatest masterpiece since Hamlet, it doesn't stand a chance.

Practice of Sunday drama articles by Kerr, Herald Tribune, Atkinson, Times, and Chapman, News, backing up their original verdicts of the week's top play was condemned by the British writer. Thus a play which was panned in mid week on its opening, will be administered the coup de grace in the Sunday piece. NY critics, like critics the world over, Manchester concludes, have the power to break a play. But no critic in any country of the world can make the public go see something it feels is not worth while.

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' Green Room Department '
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NEW STAGES...When designers sit down to plan the new theatres allowed under the revised building codes, Kerr, Herald Tribune, hopes they will devote some thought to designing a stage proportioned in such fashion as to make subordinate scenic art really seem subordinate. He also would like this improved stage one on which everything important might actually be visible...Burr, Playbill, questions if it is educational or salutary for members of an arena audience to be able to see the faces of spectators at all times. Arena theatre, he fears, makes it difficult for fans who want to be caught up and carried by the magnificent illusion that is the crux and the reason for being of all true theatre.

BEST DOZEN...Starting what might be a trend in theatre listing picking, Chapman, News, selected 10 plays and 2 musicals as representative of the 1952-53 season. Narrative versions will appear in Random House's "Theatre '53." List includes Wonderful Town, Wish You Were Here, Picnic, The Time of the Cuckoo, The Crucible, Mr. Pickwick, The Climate of Eden, My 3 Angels, Bernardine, Love of 4 Colonels, Dial M For Murder, 7 Year Itch. Critic hopes list will arouse anger and protest.

COLUMN TIPS...Rosalind Russell is continuing in Wonderful Town with a severe case of laryngitis and fever, reports Winchell...Who will be the first producer to print his program on a liquor bottle label, wonders Sylvester...Variety is still pondering on whatever did become of Terry Holmes. Actress picked by NY drama critics in 1943-44 season as the most promising of year has been unheard from since.

TODD DEPT...Mike Todd took the path of true courage, admires McHarry, News, in issuing a 2nd invitation to NY cab drivers to view his Jones Beach outdoor Night in Venice show. First try was rained out, even though 500 drivers showed up...A free story line for next year's Jones Beach show was offered Todd by Sheaffer, Eagle. Critic would like to see an outdoor musical based on the 1920's, that gaudy, bathtub gin drinking era. The huge stage could be used for a 3 ring sort of hullabaloo, while the lagoon would halt the necessity of a tightly knit story...'.

DRAMA DESK NOTES...Vernon Rice, NY Post drama critic, suffered a heart attack and is now a patient at Medical Arts Center Hospital. Doctors say he is recovering nicely but must take things easy...Charles McHarry, a police reporter, is subbing for the vacationing members of the News drama department...Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, predicts that Joe Shipley, New Leader- WEVD, will be re-elected NY Critics Circle president..McClain, Journal American, Watts, Post, and George Jean Nathan are vacationing abroad.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...A hit-and-run tour of Broadway shows, catching the high spots in each, might be a money maker for a sharp minded speculator, suggests Chapman, News. ...Cyrano de Bergerac will certainly be one of the 3 shows produced by Jose Ferrer at the City Center, predicts Morehouse, WT&S...While Sheaffer, Eagle, suggests Ferrer present Richard III or Othello.

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' Pros & Cons by TMK '
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No one can accuse Theatre de Lys current ad for The Scarecrow of being misleading. "Really air conditioned", the ad says, and it really is. Ad could have also said "Really original." Percy MacKaye's lively Fantasy is certainly the most original script shown in NYC

this season, including Camino Real. Fine acting performances by Eli Wallach and Douglas Watson, plus some exciting first act stage tricks that work perfectly, make the show, which closes this Saturday, a must for every serious theatre fan. It's the kind of theatre that makes you think.

NYC Theatre News Round Up

Exactly one month after the passage of the amended NYC Building Codes by the NYC Council, 2 new legitimate theatres are being planned. One will be a combination theatre-office building-garage construction, one of the types permitted under the recently amended code. The combination 14 story building will be located on the north-east corner of 46th St and 6th Ave. Sigfried Malm and Associates have engaged John and Drew Eberson to draw up plans, but no date for demolition of the present buildings on the site has been set. The City Investing Company, which owns 4 legitimate and movie theatres in the Broadway area, plans construction of a new legitimate theatre. Robert Dowling, president, said that the site had been picked, but declined to name the exact location. He did state that though the building would not be a dual construction, it would provide facilities for parking, a restaurant and stores. Except for Billy Rose's intentions of converting the spacious first floor lounge of his Ziegfeld Theatre into a bar, no other NY theatre owner has taken advantage of the code amendment allowing the serving of food and liquor in legitimate theatres.

The Rockefeller Foundation and Jose Ferrer, who at times seems a whole foundation all by himself, joined this week in insuring an interesting program for the NYC Center of Music and Drama. A \$200,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation is to be applied specifically for the creation of new opera and ballet productions. \$100,000 of this is to be spent during the 1953-54 season. While Ferrer, currently making his musical comedy debut in "Kiss Me Kate" at the Dallas State Fair, will present a special 6 week drama series at the City Center Starting December 11. The actor-director-producer, who inaugurated the first play series at the City Center in 1948, plans to direct and appear in 3 plays, each running 2 weeks. This is in addition to his planned Broadway production of The Dazzling Hour, which will be tried out July 28 at California's La Jolla Summer Theatre starring Olivia de Havilland. To complete the record of this week's Ferrer activities, he was divorced from dancer Phyllis Hill and announced plans to marry singer Rosemary Clooney.

Plays

The Crucible closed Saturday July 11 after a 6 month run at the Martin Beck. A national tour is planned for September...Carnival in Flanders opened on schedule in Los Angeles July 6 to a set of mixed notices from the California critics for the Michael Sloane-Paula Stone musical. All did agree that Dolores Gray, last seen on Broadway in Two on the Aisle stole the show.

People

A squadron of top writers and players have been signed for John Murray Anderson's Almanac. With rehearsals of the revue starting Sept 15, producers Harry Rigby, Jr and Stanley Gilkey announce that sketches will be written by Mary Chase, George Axelrod, and Jean Kerr. Score will be by Vernon Duke and Henry Sullivan, with lyrics by Ogden Nash. Cast will feature US debut of Hermione Gingold...Due to a severe case of food poisoning Lawrence Tibbett will not begin his scheduled 10 guest appearances as "Porgy" in Porgy and Bess July 15. Though several Negro actor groups have objected to the appearance of a white man in the role of a negro, producer Robert Breen will go ahead with his unusual plan as soon as Tibbett's health warrants.

Theatre Film Notes

New Faces, Leonard Sillman's revue now in Chicago, will be photographed in 3 D color the last week in July by Berman Swartz, independent film producer...Oklahoma will be filmed by Magna Theatre Corporation via Todd AO wide film process...Hazel Flagg has been bought by Paramount as a future Martin & Lewis feature.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

NBC Radio presents "The Friml Story" July 13 on "Railroad Hour"...Henry Lassoe, Wonderful Town, doubles in NBC TV "The Goldbergs."

